



THE FISHING NEVER STOPS

The fishing never stops in Ontario. Not when the snow falls; not even when the lakes freeze over in our glistening wonderland of stark silhouettes and muffled sounds.

As winter clenches its fist, the lure of ice fishing gradually overtakes thousands of anglers across the province. Easy, accessible, fun and well established in popularity, winter fishing can be as primitive or as cosily contemporary as the angler wishes. Bundled-up fishermen may crouch in a razor wind on a wooden crate. Or they can relax in shirtsleeves surrounded by family and friends in the comfort of a heated ice-hut. Either way, winter anglers require little equipment. All that's needed is a baited hook and line and an auger or a long-handled chisel to cut through the ice.

Winter fishing originated with native Indians who, after carving holes in ice often more than two feet thick, would wait for hours on end in bitter weather to spear any fish that swam into view. In order to make the fish easier to detect, they eliminated bothersome overhead light by squatting under animal skins. In time, settlers refined this ancient tradition by introducing wooden ice huts, equipped with stoves and benches. Because spearing was outlawed just before the turn of the century, today fishermen use a basic line through the ice (not even a reel is needed) and a simple balancing device known as a "tip-up", which tells the angler when a fish bites.

Ice huts are lightweight so they may be hauled over the ice on small hand sleighs or by snowmobile. There are plenty of commercial operators eager to rent out huts complete with ice holes, propane stoves, fishing tackle, bait and transportation (should the hut be located far from shore). Fly-in winter fishing is a popular attraction in northern Ontario.



WINTER FISHING in Ontario

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Hon. Alan W. Pope
Minister
John R. Sloan
Deputy Minister



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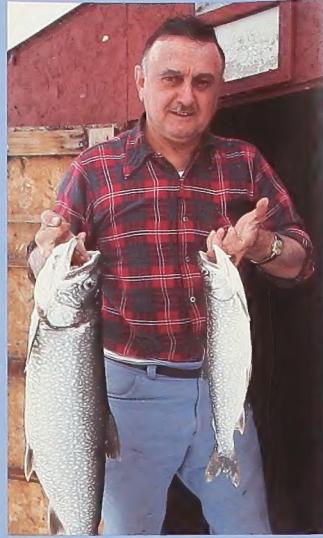
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In southern Ontario, the ice fishing season lasts from the beginning of January to mid-March, depending on temperatures. The season may extend for another month to six weeks in the north of the province where colder temperatures prevail. However, for lake trout — a popular attraction in wintertime — the season has been shortened in many areas where populations have drastically declined (see the Ontario fishing regulations summary for details).

Daily limits on catches vary according to species and location.

WHERE TO GO...

Pretty well anywhere there's a frozen lake in Ontario, there's the prospect of ice fishing. Concentrations of ice huts and hut rentals can be found on Lakes Simcoe and Steveston — just a short drive from Toronto — Lake Nipissing, Lake Erie (around Turkey Point), Lake Temagami, and Georgian Bay, especially near Owen Sound and along the eastern shoreline, among the islands. Lakeside lodges, where anglers can have all the comforts of home and the thrill of a holiday on ice, are catering more and more to ice fishermen.



WHAT'S BITING...

Lake trout

Along with its hybrid cousin the spawlk, the lake trout is a lover of frigid water. They both prefer deep, boulder-strewn lakes, but may be caught in shallower water in winter. Average size: 3-5 lbs. Bait: Live herring. Record catch: 63 lbs. 2 ozs., Lake Superior.

Whitefish

Deep-bodied, scrumptious eating. Average size: 2-4 lbs. Bait: Live minnows. Record catch: 14 lbs. 6 ozs., Big Head River, near Meaford Harbor.

Herring

Delicious, streamlined, silvery fish that travel in schools. Average size: 7-10 inches. Bait: Spoons and small pearl-like lures.

Perch

Tasty, black-barred schoolers that provide plenty of action. Average size: 4-10 ozs. Jumbo perch weigh in at around 12 ozs. Bait: Minnows or worms.

Other possible winter catches are pike, walleye, rainbows, smelt, crappies, and ling.

Special note: The large variety of species available to summer anglers is reduced in the winter because warm water fish, such as smallmouth bass and catfish, are lying dormant and eating very little. To attract whitefish and herring to the vicinity of an ice hole, pre-baiting — often with salted minnows — is commonly practised. A day or so before fishing commences, bait is dropped through the ice hole onto the lake bed. Ice hut operators usually provide a pre-baiting service.



FOR SAFETY'S SAKE...

Winter anglers must always keep a weather eye open. The strength of the ice underfoot should be a recurring question and anyone doubting the ice surface of a frozen lake should call the nearest district office of the Ministry of Natural Resources. Anglers should beware of sudden melts which can occur even in late January or February.

The key to pleasurable fishing is *keeping warm*. It's hardly possible to dress snugly enough for this frigid sport which is more readily enjoyed by having hot drinks at hand. All who venture onto winter ice should be aware of the dangers of hypothermia and how it may be treated. Frost bite can happen to anyone, so be sure to adequately protect hands, feet and face. Remember — alcohol will not warm you up. In fact, it has the opposite effect in cold weather.

While first-time winter anglers are advised to keep to the well-populated areas or areas where commercial huts are available, those determined to go it alone may wish to erect barricades of canvas or plastic to protect themselves from the raw wind.

An axe is not the best tool for making ice holes; blows glancing off the ice have led to serious injury. Recommended instead is an ice auger or ice chisel. All ice holes should be marked by heaps of snow to avoid accidents.

THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES helps to maintain good fishing by implementing ongoing programs to stock lakes and rivers and improve water quality. Volunteers often help MNR staff to create spawning beds and prevent the silting of lakes by shoring up river banks prone to erosion.

The winter fishing harvest is controlled by limits on each fisherman's daily catch and restrictions are in force concerning the use of live bait (see the Ontario fishing regulations summary for details).

Deadline for removal of ice huts is March 31 on northern Ontario lakes and March 15 in southern Ontario.

FOR MORE INFORMATION write to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Fisheries Information, First Floor, Whitney Block, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1W3. Or call 1-416-965-7883. For details on specific fishing areas contact MNR district offices listed in the Ontario fishing regulations summary.

For advice on where to stay and how to get there call the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation toll free: From Canada (except Yukon and N.W.T.)...1-800-268-3735; from New York State...1-800-462-8404; from continental U.S.A. ...1-800-828-8585.

